

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6781
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 0703

E.O. 11652:N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, CE
SUBJECT: RESURRECTION OF THE JVP

1. SUMMARY: WITH THE LAPSING OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, THE FORMERLY-PROSCRIBED READICAL PARTY WHICH SPEARHEADED THE 1971 INSURGENCY, THE JANATA VIMUKTI PERAMUNA (FVP), IS BACK IN ACTION. ALTHOUGH SOME OF ITS LEADERS ARE STILL IN JAIL, THE PARTY HAS SHOWN EVERY INDICATION OF TAKING AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN ELECTORAL POLITICS TO DEMONSTRATE "THE FALLACY OF TRYING TO ACHIEVE SOCIALISM BY PARLIMENTARY MEANS." WHILE NOT LIKELY TO WIN ANY SEATS IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION, THE FVP WILL UNDOUBTEDLY DETRACT FROM THE SLFP'S EFFORTS TO ENTICE EX-INSURGENTS INTO THEIR CAMP. THE FVP HAS CONDEMNED THE TRADIONAL LEFTIST PARTIES, WHICH HAD DISAVOWED THE INSURGENTS IN 1971. END SUMMARY.

2. ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LAST FEW EVENTFUL WEEKS IN SRI LANKA HAS BEEN THE REVIVAL OF THE RADICAL YOUTH PARTY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE 1971 INSURGENCY. THE SURFACING AGAIN OF THE JVP WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE ENDING FEBRUARY 16 OF THE STATE OF
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EMERGENCY UNDER WHICH THE PARTY HAD BEEN PROSCRIBED SOON AFTER THE INSURGENCY. THE JVP HAS LOST NO TIME IN REORGANIZING, HOLDING PUBLIC MEETINGS, PUBLICIZING ITS ACTIVITIES BY WALL POSTER, AND ANNOUNCING ITS INTENTION TO RUN CANDIDATES IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION.

3. ALTHOUGH HAMPERED BY THE CONTINUED IMPRISONMENT OF

SOME OF ITS LEADERS, PARTICULARLY GENERAL SECRETARY ROHAN WIJEWEERA, THE FVP NEVERTHELESS HAS A LEADERSHIP CADRE OF ACQUITTED INSURGENTS AS WELL AS A LARGE BLOC OF SUPPORTERS AMONG THE 18,000 YOUTHS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY IN 1971. TWO EX-INSURGENTS WHO ARE SPEARHEADING THE PARTY'S REORGANIZATION ARE UPATISSA GAMANANAYAKE AND KELLY SENANAYAKE. THE FORMER, NOW ACTING SECRETARY OF THE PARTY, WAS HELD BUT NEVER TRIED ON INSURGENCY CHARGES, PRESUMABLY FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE, WHILE THE LATTER WAS CONVICTED AND RELEASED IN DECEMBER 1976. BOTH ARE AGED 27, HIGH-LIGHTING THE VERY YOUTHFUL NATURE OF THE INSURGENCY OF SIX YEARS AGO.

4. FOR THE GSL, THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE JVP IS AN UNFORTUNATE BY-PRODUCT OF THE LIFTING OF THE EMERGENCY. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE SECURITY FORCES ARE CONCERNED BY THIS UNORTHODOX AND, IN THEIR MINDS, SEDITIOUS PARTY BEING GIVEN A PLATFORM FOR THEIR VIEWS. IN THEIR OPINION, IT INCREASES THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, BUT THEY SEE NO LEGAL RECOURSE UNLESS THE JVP IS SO IMPRUDENT AS TO PUBLICLY PREACH TREASON.

5. FROM A POLITICAL STANDPOINT TOO, THE RULING SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY HAS REASON TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE JVP ENTERING THE ELECTORAL LISTS. IT MAY APPEAR, AT LEAST TO MANY YOUNGER VOTERS, AS A WELCOME ALTERNATIVE TO THE SLFP, UNITED NATIONAL PARTY, AND THE TIRED OLD LEFTIST PARTIES. THE SLFP YOUTH

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LEAGUES' AVID ATTEMPTS, LED BY PM'S SON ANURA BANDARANAIKE, TO ENTICE EX-INSURGENTS INTO THEIR PARTY THROUGH A "SOLIDARITY FRONT" WILL BE AFFECTED. ANURA'S PARTICULAR INTEREST IN DISCREDITING THE NEW PARTY IS DEMONSTRATED BY SEVERAL ARTICLES THAT HAVE APPEARED IN HIS TIMES PRESS GROUP, IN WHICH THE JVP HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF BUILDING NEW SECRET CELLS IN THE PROVINCES AND A REPUTED CRIME WAVE IN THE NORTH CENTRAL PROVINCES HAS BEEN LABELLED AS A JVP FUND-RAISING EFFORT. (IN FACT, THEFT WAS A MONEY-RAISING DEVICE USED BY THE INSURGENTS BEFORE 1971).

6. ONE OF THE MORE UNLIKELY ALLIANCES THAT COULD BE ENVISIONED WOULD BE AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE ALL-SINHALESE JVP AND THE TAMILS. NEVERTHELESS, S. THONDAMAN, PRESIDENT OF THE CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS AND DE FACTO LEADER OF THE ONE MILLION INDIAN TAMILS, RECENTLY PRAISED TO AN EXTENT THE NEW JVP LANGUAGE POLICY AND MENTIONED THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS QUALIFIED SUPPORT

FOR THE PARTY. IMPROBABLE AS THIS SEEMS, IT IS AN INDICATION BOTH OF THE INTEREST ENGENDERED BY THE JVP REVIVAL AND OF THE ESTATE TAMILS' DISSATISFACTION WITH BOTH MAJOR NATIONAL PARTIES.

7. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT NO ONE NOW EXPECTS THE JVP TO BE AN ELECTORAL POWER (EXCEPT AS A SPOILER) OR EVEN TO WIN ANY SEATS. IT WILL BE HAMPERED BY A VARIETY OF FACTORS, INCLUDING HOSTILITY AMONG OLDER VOTERS TOWARD THE BLODDY INSURRECTIONISTS OF 1971, THE PARTY'S INACTIVITY OVER THE PAST SIX YEARS, AND ITS PROBABLE INABILITY TO WIN FOR ITSELF THE STATUS OF A RECOGNIZED PARTY. (TO QUALIFY FOR AN ELECTION SYMBOL, A PARTY MUST HAVE BEEN IN EXISTENCE FOR FIVE YEARS. THE JVP WILL ARGUE THAT IT QUALIFIED BUT THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT LIKELY TO AGREE.) THE DISMAL FATE IN RECENT YEARS OF DANDIDATES WHO HAVE RUN AS INDEPENDENTS, AS THE FVP
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MEMBERS WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO DO, IS NOT AN ENCOURAGING PORTENT FOR THE PARTY.

8. AT A PRESS CONFERENCE FEBRUARY 19, GAMANANAYAKE GAVE SOEM SKETCHY IDEAS OF THE PARTY'S IDEOLOGY. HE CRITICIZED BOTH THE LSSP AND CP-- THE FORMER AS A REFORMIST PARTY AND THE LATTER AS A REVISIONIST ONE-- AND SAID BOTH BELIEVED IN CLASS COLLABORATION, RAHTER THAN THE CLASS STRUGGLE. (BOTH, INCIDENTALLY, DISAVOWED THE FVP IN 1971). HE SAID THE FVP HAS NO FAITH IN TROTSKYISM OR IN THE PROPOSED SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT. THE FVP HAD BEEN WRONG IN 1971, HE WENT ON, IN REJECTING THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS, AND WOULD NOW USE THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY AS A PLATFORM TO PROVE THE FALLACY OF TRYING TO ACHIEVE SOCIALISM BY PARLIAMENTARY MEANS. HE SAID THE THE FVP WOULD ESTABLISH RELATIONS WITH THE TAMIL COMMUNITY, HAVING REALIZED THE ERRORS OF ITS SINHALA CHAUVINISM IN 1971.

9. ANOTHER AND SEPARATE INSURGENT-LINKED PARTY HAS BEEN FORMED IN RECENT WEEKS BY MAHINDA WIJESEKERA, A JVP MEMBER NOT INN THE INNER CIRCLE WHO WAS ACQUITTED OF ALL CHARGES. HIS JAHAJANA VIMUKTI PAKSHAYA ALSO PLANS TO CONTEST AT THE ELECTION AND NOW MAINTAINS THAT IT IS AND WILL REMAIN SEPARATE FROM THE JVP. ITS FIRST PUBLIC MEETING IN COLOMBO THIS WEEK REPORTEDLY ATTRACTED AN IMPRESSIVE CROWD.

10. COMMENT: PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE HAS BOASTED WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION OF HER LENIENT TREATMENT OF THOSE WHO ROSE AGAINST HER GOVERNMENT IN 1971. SHE HAS BEEN,

UNABLE, HOWEVER, TO ALLEVIATE THE SEVERE
PROBLEMS OF POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT WHICH MOTIVATED
THE UPRISING. IT IS THESE PROBLEMS WHICH HAV KEPT
THE PROSCRIBED FVP SIMMERING UNDER THE SURFACE FOR
SIX YEARS. WITH ITS NEW RESPECTABILITY AND THE
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CONTINUED RISE IN THE YOUTH POPULATION THE FVP COULD
BECOME A POTENT POLITICALFORCE IN COMING YEARS.
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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